

Interlibrary Loan - Reference Collaboration: Filling Hard-to-Find Faculty Requests

MARGARET H. BEAN

Resource Sharing Librarian, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

MIRIAM RIGBY

Social Sciences Librarian, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

INSTITUTION PROFILE

The University of Oregon (UO), located in Eugene, Oregon, has a population of almost 26,000, including students, faculty and staff. The UO is a member of the Orbis Cascade Alliance consortium made up of 36 college and university libraries in the Pacific Northwest.

The ILL unit resides in the Access Services department of the UO libraries. This unit currently is staffed by 1 resource sharing librarian, 4.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and 2 FTE student assistants. We fill approximately 30,000 borrowing requests per year and 45,000 lending requests per year.

The UO Libraries employ over 25 FTE subject specialists. Their areas of expertise include subject-based knowledge covering virtually all the fields taught and researched at the university.

These subject specialists are placed throughout the library across a number of departments including Cataloging, Reference, Acquisitions, and subject-based branch libraries.

BACKGROUND

Prior to November 2008, UO library patrons utilized three separate databases in searching for books and audiovisual materials: the UO's local catalog, the Orbis Cascade Alliance consortial database (Summit), and OCLC's FirstSearch. Undergraduates usually searched in the local catalog and only occasionally ventured into Summit. Graduate students and faculty members searched in the local catalog and in Summit and sometimes requested items via interlibrary loan that they located in FirstSearch.

In November 2008, the UO Libraries, as part of the Orbis Cascade Alliance, went live with OCLC Navigator as our consortial borrowing tool. Navigator became a search engine incorporating our local Summit catalog as well as the WorldCat catalog allowing patrons to search both catalogs at once. In August 2009 the UO libraries went live with WorldCat Local which includes the Summit catalog, OCLC's FirstSearch and the UO local catalog. With WorldCat Local's integration of the three databases, all library patrons are able to search all three catalogs at one time. The search bar for WorldCat Local is prominently displayed on the UO homepage allowing patrons immediate access to the database. Also, since the interlibrary loan request button is prominently displayed on each WorldCat record for which there is no Summit or UO holding, both discovery and requesting have become easy one-click processes.

The impact of implementing OCLC Navigator was immediate. In January 2009 we saw an increase of 122% in filled returnable borrowing requests over January 2008. Implementing WorldCat Local further impacted the UO's interlibrary loan unit. When school reconvened in late September 2009 we saw an additional increase in filled ILL borrowing returnable requests of 57%.

Hiring additional staff and implementing the OCLC/ILLiad interlibrary loan management software has enabled us to manage our increased workload. However, dealing with the increase in borrowing requests has not been our only concern. We have also seen a change in the types of items requested including requests for foreign, audio visual and very new items as well as for items held only by a few institutions. It is often difficult and time consuming to find providers for these types of materials. Illustrating this problem is the fact that at one point in January 2010 we had over 800 requests in our borrowing "unfilled" queue.

ENGAGING SUBJECT SPECIALISTS

We realized that ILL could no longer go it alone. In the past, UO library subject specialists assisted the ILL unit in tracking down hard-to-verify bibliographic citations. However, thanks to World Cat Local and to bibliographic databases using open URL resolvers to pass through complete book and article citations into ILLiad, citation verification is no longer a major issue for us. The challenge now is in finding a means of getting hard-to-locate items into the hands of our patrons.

For some time we have been thinking about tapping into staff members' hidden skills and interests to promote communication and interdepartmental collaboration throughout the library. Library units hold regular cross-training sessions, and dedicate at least one day annually to sharing our knowledge and skills with one another. Further, individual librarians have taken it upon themselves to broaden their skills by offering their time to other departments in exchange for the learning that comes with working on new projects.

With this type of collaboration in mind, we realized that we could employ the expertise of UO subject specialists to help process our more challenging requests. We needed what subject specialists have in such abundance: an in-depth knowledge and understanding of their patrons' current research, language fluency, a knowledge of strong library collections and colleagues in their subject areas, as well as knowledge of specialized publishers.

Our first step was to decide which subject specialists to include in the program. Using ILLiad Web Statistics we identified the areas in which we receive most of the difficult requests from faculty and selected subject specialists who support these areas. Our focus was primarily on the areas of music, East Asia, the social sciences, Romance languages, and the humanities.

We were concerned with the impact of such a program on the subject specialists' workload. We decided that we would begin by asking subject specialists to work only on requests placed by faculty members. Researching difficult requests placed by graduate and undergraduate students could be added to the subject specialists' workload at a later time once the impact on their workload had been determined.

We began our ILL-reference collaboration in May 2010 and the program is ongoing. It is similar to other libraries' projects to provide better access to materials, though it is unique in some of its goals and the manner of implementation (Kern, 2006)¹.

DELIVERING REQUESTS TO SUBJECT SPECIALISTS

We debated how best to provide subject specialists with information regarding these difficult requests. After considering several options we decided that the most efficient means of transferring this information to the subject specialists would be to give them direct access to the original record within ILLiad. With access to the ILLiad record the subject specialist can easily see patron information including name, status and department, see the exact citation and the "reason for no" history. This gives the subject specialist a more complete picture of who is

¹ Most notably, Kern and Weible's article, *Reference as an Access Service* (2006), explores the inclusion of reference librarians and graduate assistants in the ILL process to provide better access to resources. We created our project independently, used significantly different technical methods of implementation, and explore additional future opportunities possible due to our methods. Yet, encountering both projects together provides an opportunity for "repetition" of an experiment in different environments with differing university communities. As librarians move away from one-size-fits-all implementation of ideas from other libraries, having multiple testing grounds for similar projects provides an invaluable resource to assist in determining how such a project might work in one's own library environment.

requesting the item and the history of actions already taken, thus cutting down on duplication of effort.

Our next decision was which ILLiad processing steps should be handled by subject specialists. We determined that subject specialists would not place actual requests; instead they would use data from the ILLiad request record to determine how to find a supplier for the item. Using the powerful ILLiad email routing rules subject specialists would then move the request to the next queue so that ILL staff could finish processing it.

TRAINING

We provided subject specialists with an hour and a half training which included a PowerPoint demonstration with ILLiad screen shots as well as time to work on processing sample requests. Training included logging into ILLiad, locating the “Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist” queue, learning to read the request record (finding bibliographic information, OCLC accession number, user information and “reasons for no” data), a discussion of the “reasons for no” and how to choose the appropriate option to email the patron or to route the request to another queue. The PowerPoint slides were loaded onto the library intranet for future reference and training. A link was provided to a list of online sources used by interlibrary loan staff for international bibliographic verification.

WORKFLOW

We developed the following workflow to integrate subject specialists into the interlibrary loan process:

Interlibrary Loan Staff

Interlibrary loan staff members take processing and searching a request as far as they can until the item becomes “unfilled” with possible lenders. Hard to track down requests are routed to the “Awaiting Processing by Librarian” queue where the resource sharing librarian double checks to make sure all obvious sources have been explored. The librarian then identifies the appropriate subject specialist and uses ILLiad e-mail routing to alert the subject specialist that the request has been routed to the “Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist” queue.

Subject Specialists

The subject specialist opens the record in “Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist” queue and reviews it for patron information, “reasons for no,” double checks OCLC accession numbers used in prior searches, and then searches other sources. After review the subject specialist makes the decision to send an email from within the ILLiad record of one of the following types:

- (1) To the faculty member for more information. Sending this email leaves the request in the “Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist” queue.
- (2) To the faculty member canceling the request. Sending this email automatically routes the request to the “Canceled by ILL Staff” queue.

- (3) To the faculty member to inform him or her that the item will be purchased. Sending this email will automatically route the request to the “Canceled by ILL Staff” queue.
- (4) To the faculty member providing a link to URL if item is available on the web. Sending this email automatically routes the request to the “Request Finished” queue.
- (5) To the ILL librarian with a new OCLC number to use in requesting the item and leaves the request in the subject specialists queue.

These emails are prepopulated with patron and request data.

ILLIAD CUSTOMIZATION

As noted above, this project was accomplished by the use of ILLiad queues and ILLiad email routing. The following new queues were set up in ILLiad Borrowing using the ILLiad Customization Manager:

Awaiting Processing by Librarian

Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist

We also created the following emails with their routing rules:

FacultyCancel (request is moved to “Canceled by ILL Staff” queue)

Full Text on Web (request is moved to “Request Finished” queue)

Note to Faculty (request is left in “Awaiting Processing by Subject Specialist” queue) Faculty
Purchase (request is moved to “Canceled by ILL Staff” queue)

RESULTS

This program has been very successful. Of the 50 requests that have been forwarded to subject specialists since May 2010, 29 have resulted in purchases, 15 have been canceled, 4 have been filled via traditional ILL and 2 have been filled by web sources.

Our subject specialists say that this collaboration has been successful on many levels. They now have an additional point of contact with the faculty in their liaison departments and insight into the types of materials their faculty are requesting. Subject specialists have enjoyed the chance to learn about the ILLiad software. Despite the additional training time and work, the subject specialists report that they have not felt this has been a burden. Subject specialists currently deal with reference requests and purchase requests daily, so incorporating the ILLiad requests into these existing workflows has not significantly impacted anyone – even for the librarians receiving the most requests.

Perhaps even more importantly, our faculty members seem similarly pleased with the program. While they are not aware of the change behind the scenes, they have reacted positively when approached by subject specialists about their hard to track down interlibrary loan requests. Sometimes, a simple clarification is all that has been required – such as with an item originally requested in Japanese, for which we owned an English copy, which was equally acceptable to the

professor. In other cases, faculty members have been thrilled to be offered the option of having an item purchased for the library, when an ILL request could not be filled.

We were initially concerned that subject specialists would feel uncomfortable being bearers of bad tidings when they delivered news that an item could not be supplied either via interlibrary loan or purchase. Positive faculty response has quelled this fear; even when an item cannot be procured through interlibrary loan or purchase, faculty have told us that they appreciate the effort and the additional explanation that now comes with an interlibrary loan request rejection notice.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this collaborative effort can be called a success, and we expect to continue it indefinitely. Although some job-sharing ventures can create additional burden, and each project should be carefully considered in terms of how it fits into each library's structure and each department's workflow, that has not been the case here. An unexpected benefit of this collaboration has been the opening up of communication between interlibrary loan staff and subject specialists. Not only are subject specialists filling the needs of interlibrary loan but they are now more apt to forward requests for "just-in-time" borrowing for unfillable faculty purchase requests.

We have also found this process to be a way to get our feet wet with respect to a purchase on demand program. As the interlibrary loan staff and subject specialists become more familiar with the types of requests that can only be filled by purchase rather than via interlibrary loan we will

be able to establish realistic guidelines for a more formal purchase on demand program in the future.

Far from stealing jobs as much outsourcing does, or just shifting an overload of work around as many collaborative projects might, we have found a successful way to lighten the workload on interlibrary loan staff, without creating a noticeable burden on the subject specialists.

In the future, as the ILL unit migrates to ILLiad 8.0, we will train subject specialists in this new version of ILLiad. In particular, we will focus on training them to use the ILLiad “Addon” feature. Our next step will be to expand this program to include ILL requests from graduate students with an eye to including undergraduate requests in the future. We will also use statistics gathered in this project to make a case for a purchase on demand program at the University of Oregon.

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